

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**WOMEN IN COMBAT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This research paper demonstrates why America's exclusionary policies on women in combat are out of touch with today's ideology and justifies why these policies must be changed. It provides a history of women in the military and a history of the policies and regulations that have governed military women since the Revolutionary War. The paper analyzes arguments both for and against women in combat. It also includes opinions from key strategic leaders, as well as opinions from women who have served in combat. The paper concludes with the recommendation to eliminate the policy barriers and to allow women to serve in combat.



## WOMEN IN COMBAT

Ever since America has been fighting wars, there has been controversy surrounding the women serving in those wars. Strategic guidance in the form of presidential directives, Congressional Acts, and Department of Defense (DoD) policies has been written and rewritten over the years. This guidance first limited and then expanded American women's roles in the military, and particularly, their roles in combat. Over the years, guidance became less stringent and gradually offered women more opportunities in the military; however, policies still exist that exclude women from serving in direct combat positions. Strategic leaders in the United States (US) who support these exclusionary policies do so for a variety of reasons; and, after much debate, it is apparent that these leaders must now critically analyze those reasons. Women, who once may have been grateful for the protection afforded by these policies, no longer feel the need for such protection and believe the policies are simply a mask for discrimination and inequality.

This paper examines the motivation of American strategic leaders who continue to support exclusionary policies for women in the military. It also analyzes the complex issues surrounding women serving in combat and addresses why current American policy on women in combat is out of touch with today's ideology. It further demonstrates that it is time for American strategic leaders to review and update US policies to allow women to serve in direct combat units. Before delving into the controversial issues, and to provide insight in how women's military roles have evolved from their original beginnings as support personnel, this paper first reviews the history of women in the American military.

### History of Women in the Military

Women have been serving in the military since the Revolutionary War, sometimes sneaking into combat disguised as men, but most often in the role of nurses or medical personnel. Women's duties primarily included cooking, nursing, and mending men's uniforms. Given these minor support roles, women were still intent on contributing to the fight and felt a duty to serve in spite of the "doors" that were closed to them. The establishment of the Army and Navy Nurse Corps in the early 1900s opened the doors for women to officially serve in the military, although their role was restricted to nursing. At the time the Army Nurse Corps was being established, the Army had the foresight to envision women serving in expanded roles beyond the medical field. They unsuccessfully tried to not only establish women within the Corps as nurses, but as typists and clerks as well. These attempts were met with such opposition by politicians and the American public as a whole that the Army ultimately admitted

defeat and conceded the idea.<sup>1</sup> Still, the Army and Navy Nurse Corps offered new opportunities for women and opened the doors for women in the 1900s. As a result women have played an ever-increasing role in the military, and each new American war brought new challenges, new opportunities, and expanded roles for women.

As with the limitations of the Army and Navy Nurse Corps, history shows that women have continually been limited in the military positions they have been permitted to fill. Over the years there have been mandates enacted, rules applied, laws passed, and regulations written, all aimed at preventing women from serving their country as equal counterparts to their male brethren; all aimed at keeping women out of combat.

The Women's Army Corps (WAC), established in 1943, offered women larger military roles but fell short of offering equality with men in uniform. It was not until the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 gave women a permanent place in the regular military that some progress was made toward equality.<sup>2</sup> Women in the regular Army were finally offered benefits similar to men performing comparable duties. As a result of the inroads women made in the military during the 1940s, women who had been relegated to serve as nurses for most of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century battles began to see marked advances in women's military combat support roles by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Huge progress was made in the late 1960s and 1970s as women repeatedly chiseled their names into the annals of American history. They achieved notoriety in 1960 when the first woman was promoted to the rank of Sergeant Major, and just one decade later in 1970 when the first women were promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. Women's progress continued to boom throughout the 1970s as they ensconced themselves into the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and finally into the United States Military Academy. Their advances in the 1970s culminated their assimilation into the regular Army with the disestablishment of the Women's Army Corps in 1978.<sup>3</sup>

Opportunities for women in the military continued to expand into the 21st century. Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century comprise between eight and fifteen percent of the Army's work force. Women are proudly serving in increasingly dangerous jobs as they move ever closer to enemy lines. Although women have prevailed in their attempts to embed themselves into the military structure, they still have fallen short of their goal of achieving equality. In spite of the inequality and the rules to keep women out of combat, women Soldiers today are frequently engaged in combat. They are supporting America and they are dying in Iraq and Afghanistan alongside their male counterparts.

Women continue to be hindered by policies that prohibit opportunities to serve in combat. In fairness, it is significant to understand that these policies were not affected for the sole purpose of discriminating against women. They were affected to protect American women from the harshness of combat and to prevent the perceived compromise of combat readiness. Just as the history and evolution of women in the military is key to understanding the current role of women in today's military, so is the history and evolution of the exclusionary policies critical to analyzing the rationale behind those policies. To begin at the start of policy evolution, one must again go back to the Revolutionary War.

#### History of American Policy on Women in the Military

Rules governing the Revolutionary War dictated that women who served their country did so at half the pay and half the rations of men, and they did so without the authorization to wear uniforms. The closest thing to a combat role in which they were permitted to serve was to carry water to the artillery men.<sup>4</sup> While the establishment of the Army and Navy Nurse Corps in the early 1900s opened doors for women to officially join the military, regulations dictated that they did so with no military rank and without the benefits afforded to their male counterparts. In 1947 Congress passed the Army-Navy Nurse Act which integrated nurses into the officer ranks of the regular Army and Navy but limited them to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, except for a Nurse Corps Director who was permitted to receive the rank of Colonel.<sup>5</sup>

The passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in 1948 made large strides by bringing women into the regular military, but did little to improve equality. Women were allowed to only constitute two percent of the total force, and of that, no more than ten percent could be officers. Unless a director, pay for women was capped at grade O-3. This cap remained in affect for almost 20 years, until it was modified in 1967. Women were also primarily denied spousal benefits for their husbands and they were precluded from having command authority over men.<sup>6</sup> The Act also restricted women from serving on Navy ships and aircraft that engaged in combat missions. This, by default, essentially barred women from the Marine Corps. Since the original WAC policy excluded women from combat, no specific mention of women in combat was in this particular act.<sup>7</sup>

In 1951 Executive Order 10240 authorized the military services to automatically discharge any women who became pregnant or who adopted a child while in the military. This order remained in effect until the 1970s when the Services ended the mandate for forcible separation, instituted waivers, and offered voluntary separation for new mothers.

A Supreme Court decision in 1972 (*Frontiero versus Richardson*) expanded women's roles and rights. Among other things, the decision opened ROTC to women, allowed women to attend war college, and opened additional occupational fields (intelligence, cryptology, public affairs, maintenance, chaplain, and civil engineering) to women.<sup>8</sup>

The Army's 1977 Combat Exclusion Policy opened many previously closed military occupations, but officially closed all combat occupations to women. In 1978 Congress amended the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 to permit women to serve on certain types of non-combat ships. This Act created new opportunities for women in both the Navy and the Marine Corps.<sup>9</sup>

Direct combat probability coding (DCPC), which still exists today, was an attempt by the Army in 1982 to identify positions that the Army believed should be closed to women. Essentially, this coding system estimates the chance that a specific position will be involved in combat and then, based on that probability estimate, a determination is made as to whether or not women should be assigned to that position.<sup>10</sup>

In 1992, Army Regulation 600-13, Army Policy for the Assignment of Female Soldiers, was published to control the assignment of female Soldiers. This regulation stated that women could serve "in any officer or enlisted specialty or position except in those specialties/positions or units (battalion size or smaller) which are assigned a routine mission to engage in direct combat, or which collocate routinely with units assigned a direct combat mission."<sup>11</sup> However, within a year of AR 600-13 being published, the National Defense Authorization (NDA) Act for Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993 repealed the prohibition of women in combat aircraft. The same NDA act also reviewed the government's policy on women in direct ground combat and recommended it remain unchanged.<sup>12</sup>

Current policy guidance came in 1994, when the Secretary of Defense established a new DoD policy which further defined and refined all previous policies. This policy stated that women were to be excluded from assignment to units below brigade level whose primary mission is direct ground combat. The policy defined direct ground combat as 1) engaging the enemy with individual/crew served weapons; 2) exposure to hostile fire and to the high probability of direct physical contact with the enemy; and 3) located well forward on the battlefield while locating and defeating the enemy with fire, maneuver, or shock effect. It further stated that upon notification of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), additional restrictions may be added to include assignments based on collocation, cost, special operations forces (SOF) units, etc.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that while the policy offered guidance for adding restrictions, it mentioned nothing about possibilities for waiving the restrictions.



## Arguments

After reviewing the history and the ever-changing policies, it becomes obvious that indecision reigns regarding American policies on women in the military. American leaders have put much effort into policies intent on keeping women out of combat. This raises many questions. Are America's strategic leaders focused on military readiness? Are they trying to protect mothers and daughters? Is there any justifiable reason to maintain current policies and keep women from serving in combat roles? Some would offer a resounding "yes" to those questions while others would argue that America's leaders are simply discriminating against women. Those who believe the current exclusionary policies are appropriate would justify those policies with the argument that women are inferior and would impact combat readiness because they cannot emotionally or physically perform in a combat environment. Others would justify the policies saying that women are a distraction and a complicating factor for men in combat. Still others view women as the nation's primary caregivers and justify the policies because they believe that it is morally and ethically wrong to send women, whom they believe are designed for nurturing, into combat. This paper critically analyzes each of these arguments in great detail.

American policy cannot be based on opinions; it must be based on fact. Many of the primary arguments against sending women into combat are not based on facts; they are based on opinions and misconceptions. It is easy to dispel the arguments when each issue is objectively and critically analyzed.

The first argument that women are inferior and cannot perform in a combat environment is unsubstantiated. Women are mentally disciplined and emotionally strong enough for the rigors of battle. There is a misconception that because men are statistically more violent than women that they are better suited for the battlefield. Rather, it is more important to have an individual with mental discipline and emotional stability on the battlefield than to have one who is merely violent. The United States has experienced multiple international embarrassments caused by the murderous actions of violent male Soldiers. The sex of an individual does not predetermine one's violent tendencies, emotional stability, or mental fortitude. Women have proven themselves throughout society to be mentally and emotionally formidable by routinely performing highly stressful jobs such as doctors, lawyers, chief executive officers of Fortune 500 companies, paramedics, firemen, and policemen. Women have also proven their capacity for violence and ruthlessness by the fact that there are 2.1 million women in American prisons serving sentences for violent crimes.<sup>14</sup>

It is estimated that in the 1960s and 1970s, more than 100,000 American men so feared combat in Vietnam that they left the country to avoid being drafted.<sup>15</sup> It is likely that many Americans, especially Vietnam veterans, would agree that these draft dodgers epitomize cowardice and prove that not all men are prepared for combat.

Men can be equally as emotionally stable or unstable as women. It is difficult to determine the exact number of cases of depression since men often decline to seek help, but it is estimated that men suffer from depression at approximately the same rate as women.<sup>16</sup> It is noteworthy to recognize that the result of male depression culminates in a 400 percent higher suicide rate than female depression,<sup>17</sup> certainly not evidence of superior emotional stability. In addition, 80 percent of substance abuse addicts are men,<sup>18</sup> which translates into disciplinary issues for commanders. To use the argument of emotional stability as a reason to exclude an individual from combat dictates that the same standard be applied to both male and females, and clearly women could measure up to the standard.

Perhaps the most frequent argument used to oppose women in combat is that women are inferior physically and cannot perform in combat. It is true that men are physically different from women, but that is not to say that men are physically more capable of performing a combat role than women. In May of 1995 the United States Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine at Natick, Massachusetts, conducted a study of women's strength. The 24-week study physically trained and strengthened 41 women from different walks of life to determine if the women could be trained to perform traditional male military jobs. This study concluded that given the proper amount of training, most women (more than 75 percent of the women studied) were able to perform duties traditionally performed only by males in the military.<sup>19</sup> A similar study conducted in Great Britain by the Ministry of Defence concluded that "women can be built to the same levels of physical fitness as men of the same size and build."<sup>20</sup> These statistics beg for a common physical standard to be established for military jobs. Military positions should be determined not on the sex of the individual, but on the individual's ability to physically perform the job. It would be just as wrong to expect a small, weak female to lift an 80-pound rucksack as it would be to expect the same from a small, weak male. Military jobs should be allotted based upon qualifications and capabilities, not stereotypes.

Women, for the most part, expect no special considerations due to their physical characteristics. The military created its own prejudices in highlighting the inequalities of the sexes by creating vastly different physical fitness and performance standards, especially for the Annual Physical Fitness Training (APFT) exercises. Although it is not the fault of the women serving in the military units, men feel animosity toward them because of the large discrepancy in

the APFT standards between men and women. This animosity bleeds over into interpersonal relationships and causes conflict between the sexes. Recognizing that there truly are physical differences between men and women, the military must accept these differences as reality and not try to "accommodate" either sex. Military strategic leaders must review the policies and create equal standards based on actual requirements. Further, they need to review Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) and duty positions to determine the qualifications required for satisfactory performance, document the standards, and then adhere to the standards. Soldiers should be assigned to those MOSs and duty positions based solely upon their capability to perform the job.

The argument that women are a "distracter" for men in combat is like blaming a woman for having been raped because she was out after dark. Soldiers, whether male or female, must be held accountable for their actions. Because some men maintain stereotypes about women does not mean that women should suffer the consequences. The arguments of distraction range from claims that women detrimentally affect unit cohesion and male bonding to arguments that a man will try harder to protect a woman in a foxhole than another man. Some say that men are unable to treat a woman as an equal "battle buddy." For some men, a paradigm shift may be required to think differently about women, and lessons on how to make that paradigm shift should be incorporated into combat training.

A 1997 RAND Corporation study reported that in some cases, having women in a unit might actually be beneficial for the men in the unit. RAND reported that in gender-integrated units, men tended to maintain a higher personal hygiene level. It also claimed that in these gender-integrated units, there were fewer incidences of men fighting and drinking to excess, which resulted in fewer disciplinary actions. The study attributed men's improved behavior to men confiding their problems to the women in the units (something not done with male peers), thus reducing the stress levels of the men.<sup>21</sup>

Another distracter blamed on women is the turmoil and disruption that is sometimes created as a result of emotional involvement between men and women in a unit. Claims of promiscuity abound, and havoc ensues if pregnancy is a result of the promiscuity. Having the ability to bear children is yet another physical difference between men and women that certainly impacts unit readiness if a woman is redeployed due to pregnancy. These infractions are discipline issues that should be addressed by the unit commanders. To solely punish all women by not allowing them into the units with men because of such behavior is not acceptable. Furthermore, like in the RAND study, some commanders have reported that there is actually a decrease in the overall number of disciplinary incidents in gender-integrated units because the

emotional involvement between the men and women had the affect of reducing the stress levels in men, thereby reducing the number of brawls and other inappropriate behaviors.

### Current Situation

In spite of the ongoing arguments and debates, a woman performing in combat is a reality today. With the onset of America's War on Terror and all the changes that come about as a result of the war's 360-degree battlefield, the policies that were designed by strategic leaders are no longer clear and reasonable. These policies have created disagreements within Congress and have become a battlefield of their own. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, women forbidden by policy to be involved in direct combat are being placed in harm's way in Iraq, and they are being shot and killed at a rate never before experienced.

In spite of DoD's intent to control the roles of women in combat and the Army's objective to abide by the rules, actually following the rules is difficult in the asymmetric battlefield conditions in Iraq. The 1994 DoD policy prevents women from driving tanks, but it does not prevent them from piloting fighter jets or commanding warships.<sup>22</sup> Women did not participate in the initial assault on Baghdad, nor were they used to clear insurgents in Fallujah,<sup>23</sup> but today they are in Baghdad and Fallujah carrying weapons, performing house-to-house searches across the country and frisking Iraqi women.<sup>24</sup> Women are turret gunners, patrol guards, and drivers on the same roads where roadside bombs are killing their male counterparts daily. Many women have already been killed on those roads and it is expected many more will die before the war ends. To date, more than 65 American military women have died while fighting the war against terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>25</sup>

How can this be happening? Why, in spite of legislation, is America not protecting its women? Is the Army violating the 1994 policy? The answer is that times have changed. The war in Iraq is not the same as previous wars. Times and battlefields have become less linear since the 1994 policy was implemented. No longer is there an asymmetric battlefield<sup>26</sup> with a clear line of demarcation between friendly and enemy territory. There is not even a clear distinction between friend and foe. The front line is difficult at best to discern and it constantly shifts as combat Soldiers unexpectedly come under fire, putting the support units with them under attack as well.<sup>27</sup> Part of the difficulty enforcing the current Pentagon policy is that the lines are so gray that it is nearly impossible to apply the policy fairly and appropriately in today's situation. Referring to the 1994 policy, CPT Megan O'Connor, serving with the New Jersey National Guard as a medical operations and plans officer in Ramadi, Iraq, says that "They put the rules down on paper. It looks good. It reads good. But for a commander to implement, it's

impossible.”<sup>28</sup> She continued that according to the policy “you can have female medics, but they can’t see combat... [but] it’s all combat in Ramadi.”<sup>29</sup>

Some contend that the line is not as gray as the commanders on the ground like to claim. Ms. Elaine Donnelly, President of the Center for Military Readiness, claimed that leaders within the Pentagon, to meet their own agendas, are openly flouting current policy and intentionally sending women out with combat troops. She said she had no qualms about sending women into dangerous situations, but to deliberately send them out with combat troops is illegal.<sup>30</sup> Ms. Donnelly believes that Congress has not only the right but the responsibility to analyze the roles women are serving and determine if they are in accordance with policy. If not, she thinks it is up to President George Bush, Secretary of Defense, and members of Congress to enforce the law and restrain the Army.<sup>31</sup> Ms. Donnelly sent a letter to Representative Duncan Hunter, a California Republican and Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, accusing the Pentagon of breaking the rules while asking for his assistance. In her letter, she said “Female Soldiers, including young mothers, should not have to pay the price for Pentagon bureaucratic blunders and gender-based recruiting quotas that have caused apparent shortages in male Soldiers for the new land-combat brigades.”<sup>32</sup>

In May 2005 Congressman Duncan Hunter, in support of Ms. Donnelly and in a valiant effort to protect American women and to rein in the military, proposed legislation to roll back the current allowable roles of women in the military. According to the United States Army, Congressman Hunter’s proposed legislation would have closed at least an additional 21,925 positions that are currently open to women.<sup>33</sup> Congressman Hunter also proposed to give Congress approval authority over any future changes to the Pentagon’s policy on women. This meant that, if his proposal were approved, the Pentagon would have to ask Congress for approval each time the military wanted to open new battlefield support jobs to women.<sup>34</sup> This proposal differs from current policy which does not require the Pentagon to ask for approval, but merely requires them to notify Congress within 30 days of any changes made to its policy on women in the military. Controversy over Congressman Hunter’s proposal was so great that Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld called for a personal meeting with the Congressman. As a result of that meeting, Congressman Hunter not only succumbed to scaling back his original proposal, but agreed to change the wording of his proposal to eliminate the Congressional approval and to actually propose more time (from 30 days to 60 days) for the Pentagon to notify Congress of any proposed policy changes to its position on women in the military.<sup>35</sup> The Secretary of Defense’s personal involvement and the subsequent reversal of the proposed

policy was an indicator that DoD was comfortable with the roles women are currently fulfilling in Iraq.

Mr. Charles Moskos, a military sociologist at Northwestern University, believes that the military is using women in these controversial roles quite simply because they are “sorely needed in this modern-day insurgent conflict”.<sup>36</sup> Ms. Lizette Alvarez, a New York Times reporter said that the military stretches the language of the DoD policy because it is so fuzzy and because there are not enough troops, men or women, to properly fight the war on terrorism.<sup>37</sup>

History shows that when Americans feel passionate about an issue, especially when they feel that justice is not being served, they protest. Why is it then that there are neither protests nor visible outrage over the dangerous roles women are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan today? The answer may be related to the changing attitudes within American society. People have become accustomed to seeing women wearing uniforms and carrying rifles. Americans are no longer traumatized when they watch the news and hear of women dying for their country in foreign lands. Pride in the military is high in America today; the American public is proud of its Soldiers. To protest against a woman Soldier being killed in the line of duty while not also protesting her male counterpart being killed would be an insult to the families who have lost loved ones. An insight offered by Mr. Moskos as to why Americans are not shuddering at the sight of women returning home from combat in coffins is because families “would rather have someone else’s daughter die than their son.”<sup>38</sup> The lack of outrage and protest could also be that America has been transformed since the attacks of 2001. American citizens have been so angered by that invasion into their way of life that they willingly accept military action and are prepared to contribute whatever resources are necessary to prevent such a reoccurrence of events, even if it means sending their beloved daughters off to war.

### Women Soldiers

How do these beloved daughters feel about their ground-breaking role in this war on terrorism? They are proud. They are extremely proud of what they are doing in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are willingly accepting the duties, responsibilities, challenges, and dangers inherent with the more dangerous combat support missions. Performing in a heretofore male role, SPC Robyn L. Murray, a female turret gunner with a civil affairs unit said she willingly volunteered for her unique assignment the second day she arrived in Iraq.<sup>39</sup> Her fellow turret Soldier, SPC Amanda Godlewski, also volunteered for the position and claimed to enjoy being atop the vehicle despite the increased exposure to the enemy and inherent vulnerability.<sup>40</sup> SPC Lilly Withers, a female gunner in the same unit, said she “wouldn’t do anything else.”<sup>41</sup> Their

unit commander, CPT Timothy Wright, had high praise for these women. He said he was proud to have them on his team and believed that they contributed positively to the success of the mission. He said they were “as motivated and dedicated as any male Soldier I’ve ever worked with.”<sup>42</sup>

Other women are not only proud to serve in their new roles, but feel that the government not allowing them to serve is discriminatory. Marine LTC Sara Phoenix said that equality is not just about the right to vote. She claimed that not allowing women to perform specific jobs in a combat environment “flies in the face of everything we say we value in the USA.”<sup>43</sup> It appears that women serving in the military understand the ambiguity and complexity of the Pentagon policy. SGT Rachel Deaton serving in Iraq with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division understands the non-linear nature of the battlefield today. She said that any enforcement of laws to restrict women’s roles in Iraq would simply land all women back in Kuwait<sup>44</sup> since there is no clear delineation of combat zones.

SGT Leigh Ann Hester, the first female Soldier to receive the Silver Star for a close combat mission, said “It kind of makes me mad” when she hears about debates in Congress over the suitability of women in combat. She claimed that “women can basically do any job that men can.”<sup>45</sup> Her Command Sgt Major Joseph Shelley agreed. He said, “I sit here in amazement that Congress would debate this issue [of putting women in combat roles] when we’ve been doing it for so long.”<sup>46</sup> Even Army Chief of Staff General Peter Schoomaker, when asked about the women-in-combat controversy, dismissed it as not being a “gender issue.” He implied that there would soon be a new “unofficial” plan for women in combat.<sup>47</sup>

Retired Navy Captain Lory Manning claimed that women are more trusted than ever before. Some of the hesitation to put women in combat roles was partially based on theories about how women might or might not react in combat situations. She said that is no longer the case since women today have experience and that “military leaders and ordinary grunts now know that they can count on women.”<sup>48</sup> She also reported that from what she has witnessed, “the American public is not any more upset about women coming home in body bags than men.”<sup>49</sup> Mady Segal, Associate Director for the Center for Research on Military Organizations, when talking about the roles women are serving on the battlefield today, summed it up with “If they weren’t doing a good job, we would be hearing about it.”<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

In spite of the good job women are doing and the high praise they are receiving, and in spite of the fact that these women are already volunteering for combat mission roles and

receiving Silver Stars for combat, there are those who align themselves with the conventional wisdom that it is a social injustice to train a mother to kill. Instead, it is a social injustice to deny these women the right to honorably serve their country next to their male counterparts. Women have proven themselves and have earned the right to fight and die for their country. New Mexico Representative Heather Wilson contended that “we have men and women 6,000 miles from home doing a dangerous job, and we should not do anything to indicate we do not appreciate their service.”<sup>51</sup> California Representative Ellen O. Tauscher was also supportive of women in combat and criticized attempts to restrict women’s roles by stating that any such restriction “greatly infringes upon the right of women to serve in combat alongside men” and “greatly reduces the Pentagon’s ability to make needed personnel changes” in time of war.<sup>52</sup>

Women must be given the same opportunity for respect and honor as their male counterparts. There are an overwhelming number of women volunteering for direct combat missions, joining those who are already successfully conducting dangerous combat support missions. America must support these women. Women must be afforded the same opportunities to excel and advance in the military as men. Recognizing the challenges that face legislators to keep pace with the nuances of insurgent warfare and to keep pace with the changing attitudes of the American public, it is crucial that America's policies restricting women’s roles in combat be reviewed and updated. The good news is that when the exclusionary policies are reviewed, there will be real-life statistics on how well women have performed in actual combat roles.

As often happens in the heat of battle, circumstances and situations change quickly, and so must America's policies. It is America’s moral obligation and duty to do what is right for the women who are putting their lives on the line each day and to honor those women who have already given the ultimate sacrifice of their life for their country. American strategic leaders owe it to these women to review and update the exclusionary policies on women in the military and officially allow women to serve in combat. The bottom line is that it is only fair that all jobs within the services be open to all Soldiers regardless of sex, as long as the individuals are equally competent, qualified and capable of performing the job.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Military Women Veterans: Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow, available from <http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvets4.html>; Internet; accessed 13 October 2006.



<sup>2</sup> GAO Report, GAO/NSIAD-99-7, Information on DOD's Assignment Policy and Direct Ground Combat Definition, Oct 98.

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